

PART II

SKAGIT COUNTY POPULATION

Geographically, the population of Skagit County is very unequally distributed. The majority of the people live in the western part of the county on the rich, agricultural Skagit-Samish Lowland or on Fidalgo and Guemes Islands. Elsewhere, the population is confined largely to the Skagit River Valley which extends eastward into the Cascade Range. There are a few settlements in the Sauk River area in the south-central portion of the county. Other parts of Skagit County are nearly void of people because of the rugged terrain and the lack of transportation facilities.

Population Growth

The growth of Skagit County was slow prior to 1870. Lack of easy overland accessibility to the area and the hardships involved in clearing land hindered the early immigrants. Skagit was settled largely from west to east rather than vice versa because the western portion of the county was most readily accessible. The period 1870 to 1890 was one in which there was rapid population growth. Opportunities in mining, logging and agriculture brought immigrants from eastern states and Europe. By 1890, the county population was 8,747.

Construction of railroads into Skagit County stimulated rapid population growth. The years 1900 to 1910 was a decade when the county population more than doubled--14,272 to 29,241. Railroads not only brought new settlers but encouraged the growth of forest, mineral and construction industries in the area. Agriculture developed to satisfy the new markets and began to specialize in farm products best suited to the area. As a result, full-time and part-time farmers steadily increased in numbers.

Between 1910 and 1940 the population of Skagit County grew at a slow but steady rate. A relative reduction in employment opportunities and a growing scarcity of land were reflected in the slower rate of population growth. The population gained only 8,409 persons during this period from 29,241 in 1910 to 37,650 in 1940.

The 1940-1960 period witnessed an increase in the rate of population growth relative to the years between 1910 and 1940. Urban population grew rapidly as new employment opportunities in manufacturing and services became available. The number of people in the county grew from 37,650 at the beginning of the period to 43,273 in 1950 and to 51,350 in 1960. In 1960, Skagit County accounted for 1.8 percent of the state population of 2,853,214.

Urban and Rural Population

Until 1910, Skagit was entirely rural with all persons living in cities or villages under 2,500 persons, on farms or in country residences. In 1910, Anacortes reached 4,168 persons, becoming the only place in the county which was classified as urban (i.e. over 2,500 persons) by the Census. Of Skagit's population in 1910, 85.8 percent was rural and only 14.2 percent was urban.

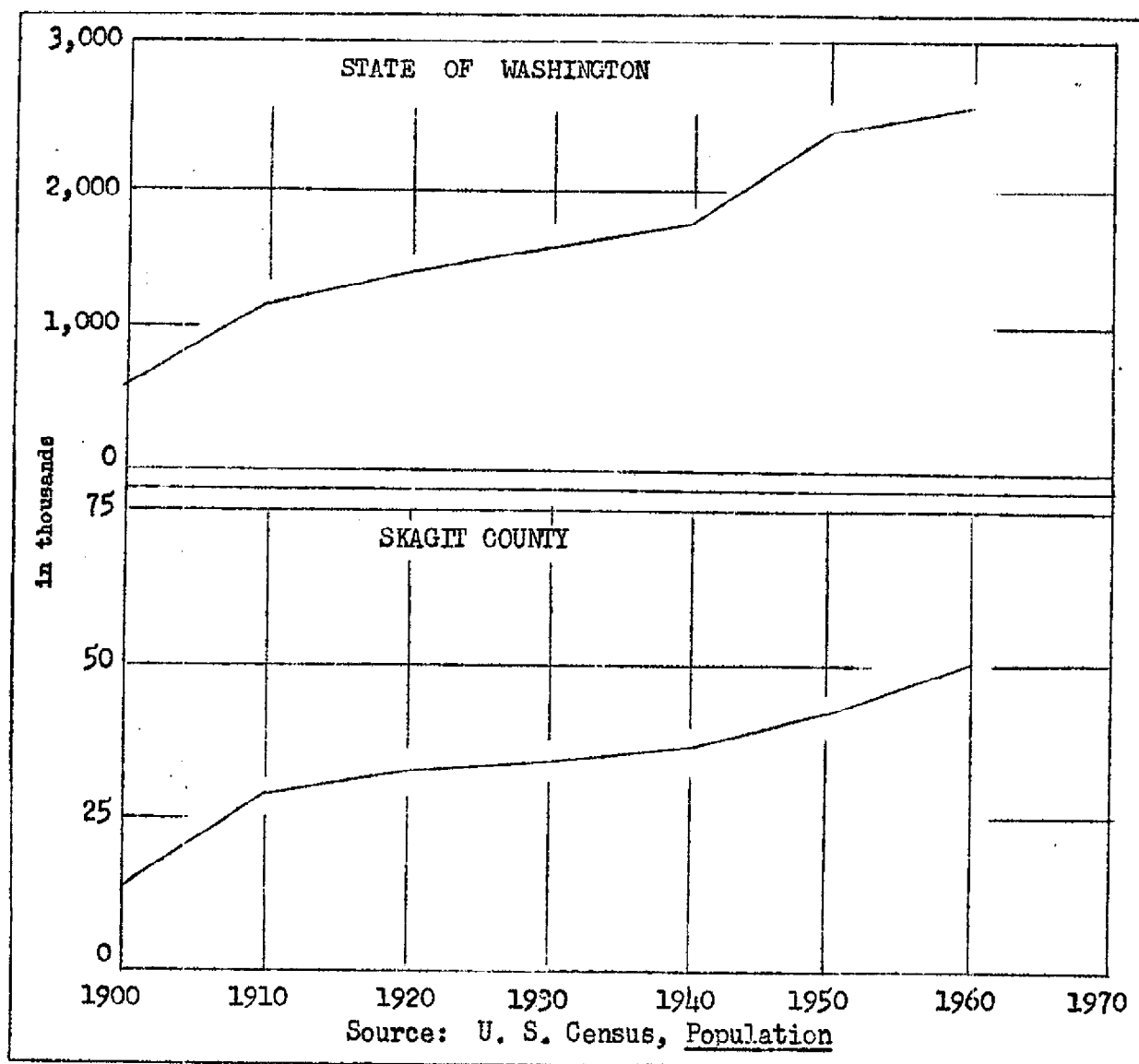


Figure 1. Population Trends: 1900-1960

Table 2. Population of Skagit County, 1890-1960

Year	Population	Percent Rural	Percent Urban
1890	8,747	---	---
1900	14,272	---	---
1910	29,241	85.8	14.2
1920	33,373	74.2	25.8
1930	35,142	63.1	36.9
1940	37,650	65.2	34.8
1950	43,273	64.2	35.8
1960	51,350	55.2	44.8

Source: U. S. Census, Population

By 1920, Mount Vernon, with a population of 3,341, joined Anacortes' 5,284 persons to make up the county's urban population. A decade later, Sedro Woolley became "urban" in 1930 with 2,719 persons. The percentage of rural population decreased and the urban population grew steadily. During the decade between 1930 and 1940, however, the urban proportion of the county population dropped from 36.9 percent to 34.8 percent. This was caused by a decline in the population of Anacortes and the net increase in number of persons living in small towns as well as the increase of rural farm and nonfarm inhabitants. Since 1940, the percentage of urban population has again been on an upward trend. By 1960, there were four urban places when Burlington joined ranks with Anacortes, Mount Vernon and Sedro Woolley. These four urban cities accounted for 44.8 percent of the total county population in 1960. With considerable farming and a variety of rural industries such as logging, lumbering, mining and hydroelectric work, a large segment of the population has remained rural. Although the cities have grown, nearly 56 percent of Skagit County residents lived in small towns or in the unincorporated part of the county in 1960.

In 1960, the rural population was predominantly rural-nonfarm, consisting of 22,826 persons who lived in the country but not on farms. The rural-nonfarm persons represented 80.5 percent of the total rural population. Rural-farm population has decreased in the two decades between 1940 and 1960. Persons living on farms numbered 11,106 in 1930, 12,285 in 1940, then dropped to 10,480 in 1950 and to 5,516 in 1960. The drop in farm population between 1950 and 1960 represents a decline of 47.3 percent. In 1960, Skagit County ranked twelfth among the counties of Washington in farm population. Both farms and people living on farms are becoming fewer, whereas the production of farm products continues to increase. Skagit County finds itself in a new period when technology fashions economic and social changes.

Table 3. Population of Incorporated Places
Skagit County, 1910-1960

Incorporated City or Town	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960
Anacortes	4,168	5,284	6,564	5,875	6,919	8,414
Burlington	1,302	1,360	1,407	1,632	2,350	2,968
Concrete	945	924	736	859	760	840
Hamilton	405	462	252	229	294	271
La Conner	603	516	549	624	594	638
Lyman	441	492	441	376	378	400
Mt. Vernon	2,381	3,341	3,690	4,278	5,230	7,921
Sedro Woolley	2,129	2,379	2,719	2,954	3,299	3,705

Source: U. S. Census, Population

Skagit County's eight incorporated places have varied in growth since 1910. The larger cities of the county--Anacortes, Mount Vernon, Sedro Woolley and Burlington--have shown consistent growth since 1910. Smaller villages which grew rapidly with an expanding logging and lumber industry declined when these activities slackened in the 1920's and 1930's. Mount Vernon, Sedro Woolley and Burlington are the main farm centers of the county. Anacortes, on the other hand, is primarily a fishing and oil storage and refinery town. The combined population of the eight incorporated places amounted to 25,157 in 1960 representing 49 percent of the total county population.

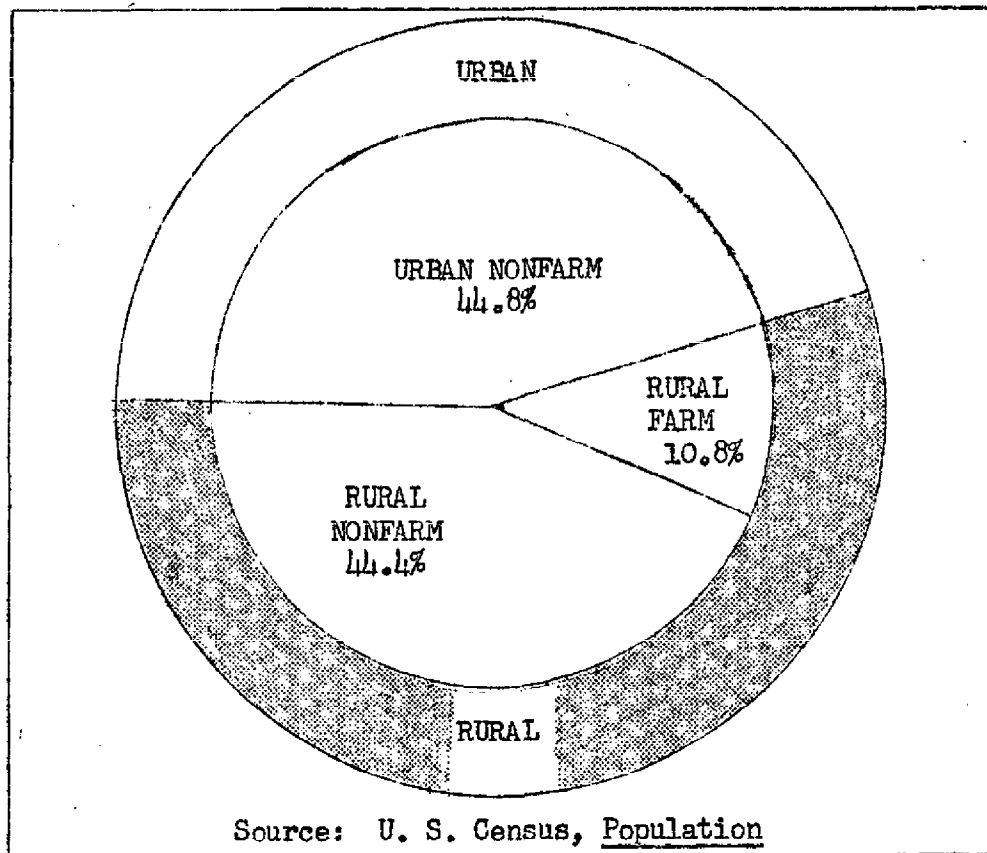


Figure 2. Urban and Rural Population, Skagit County, 1960

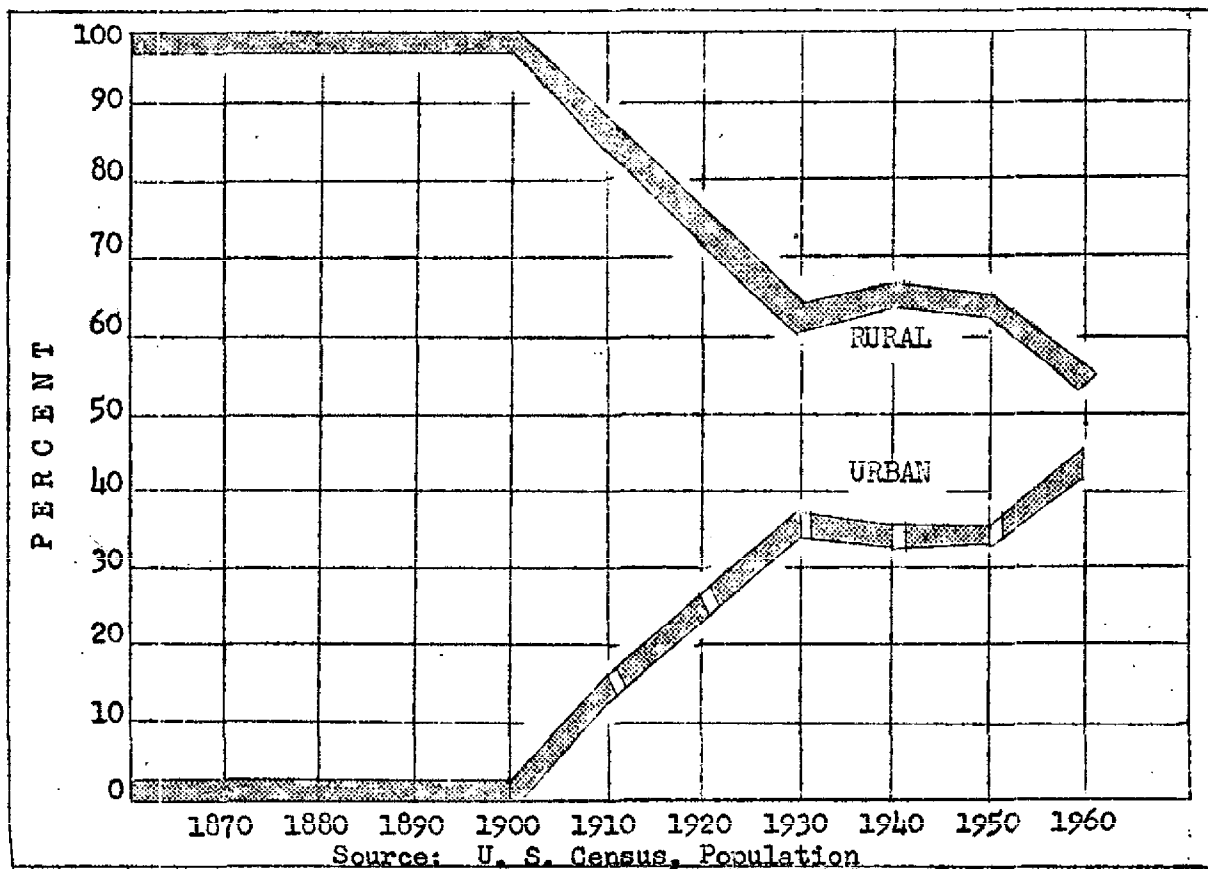


Figure 3. Rural and Urban Population Trends, Skagit County, 1870-1960

Population Characteristics

Typical of many counties in the western United States, Skagit has been a melting pot of many nationalities who have migrated from Europe to seek new lands and job opportunities. In 1900 over one-fifth of the pioneer population came from foreign lands. As a source of early immigrants, Canada, Sweden, Germany, Norway and England lead all others. These immigrants have done much to develop Skagit County agriculture, lumbering and fishing. The percentage of foreign born whites in the total population has decreased as a result of the large drop in European emigration to the United States since 1920.

In 1960, foreign born persons residing in Skagit numbered 3,282 and represented 6.4 percent of the total county population. The five largest immigrant groups were English, Swedish, Norwegian, German and Dutch. In 1960, about 24 persons out of each 100 were of foreign stock (all first and second generations) in Skagit County. There were 12,096 persons of foreign stock in the county in 1960.

The nonwhite population of Skagit County was 504, according to the Census of 1960. The races included 297 Indians, 68 Negroes, 68 Japanese, 21 Filipino and 19 Chinese. The Indians live mostly on the Swinomish Indian Reservation on southern Fidalgo Island.

In 1960, a total of 17,269 persons were employed in the county. Miscellaneous services and manufacturing were the two leading types of employment. The Census counted 4,343 working in miscellaneous services covering many trades and 4,307 in manufacturing. A large segment of the manufacturing employment was in the lumber, wood products and food processing industries. Retail and wholesale trade was third in the number of employed persons with 3,291. An even 2,000 were working in agriculture for a living, making it fourth in rank. Those employed in agriculture represented 11.6 percent of all self-employed and employed persons in the county. Forestry and mining which were important in the early days of Skagit County were relatively minor occupations in 1960.

Table 4. Employment of the Population
Skagit County, 1960

Types of Employment	Total Workers
<u>Total employed workers</u>	17,269
Agriculture	2,000
Forestry and Fisheries	161
Mining	21
Construction	1,360
Manufacturing	4,307
Transportation, Communications and other Public Utilities	841
Retail and Wholesale Trade	3,291
Miscellaneous Services	4,343
Public Administration (govern- ment employment)	688
Other employment	257

Source: U. S. Census, Population

According to the 1930 Census, there were 124 males per 100 females in Skagit County. In 1960, Skagit's population consisted of 25,752 males and 25,598 females, which was a ratio of 101 males per 100 females. The number of women relative to men tends to increase as the county becomes older and more settled. Other factors such as war and industrialization also tend to increase the proportion of women. In 1960, rural men numbered 14,534 and rural women 13,808--a ratio of 105 males per 100 females.

Skagit County's population is aging. The percentage of older people has been increasing steadily since 1870. The 1930 Census showed that only 7.4 percent of the people in the county were 65 years old and over, whereas, in 1960, they accounted for 11.0 percent of the total. Improved health practices and greater medical knowledge have played an important part in lengthening the life span. In 1960, the largest single age group was that of children to 4 years of age. Children 5 to 9 years of age formed the second largest group while those between 10 and 14 years were third. Children under 15 years of age accounted for 30.2 percent of the county's population.

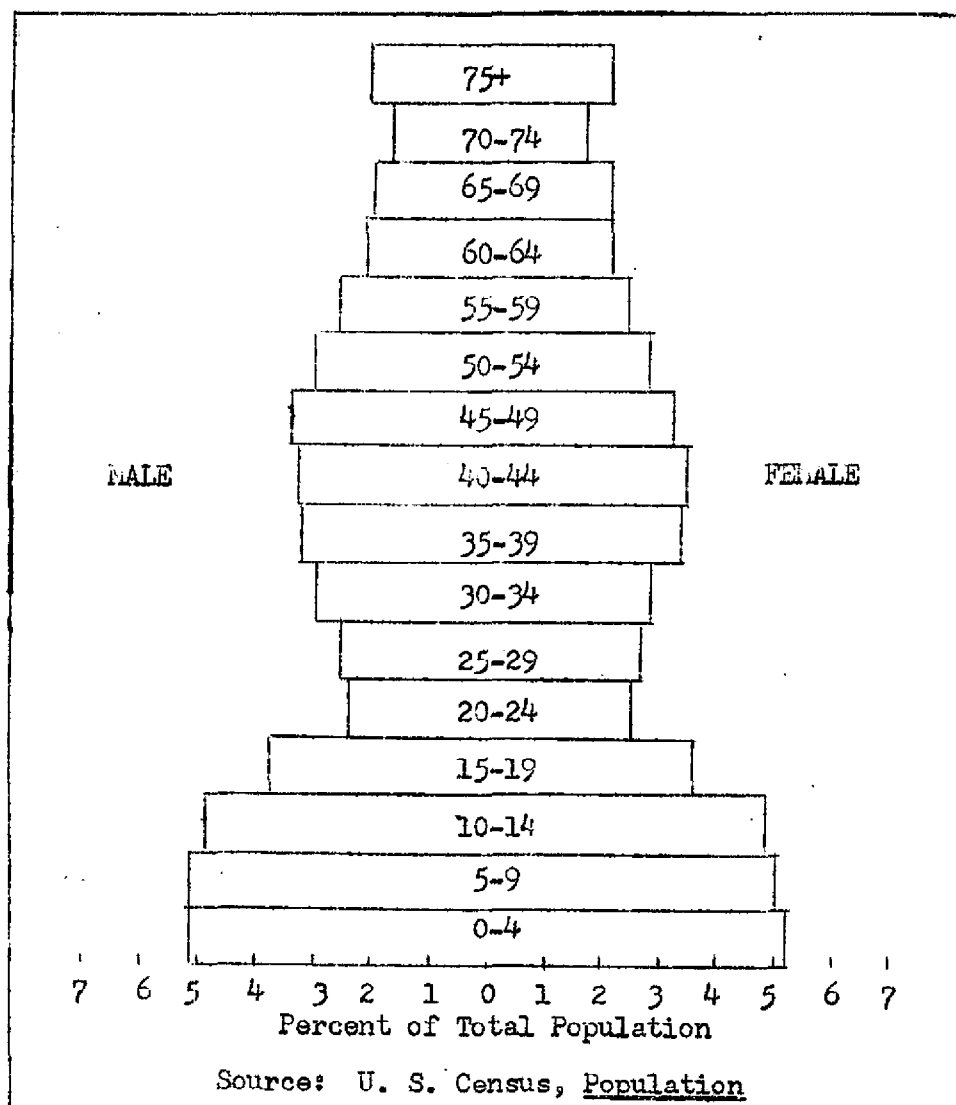


Figure 4. Age Distribution of Population, Skagit County, 1960